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Intralinguistic and extralinguistic variation factors in Old French negation with ne-Ø, ne-mie, ne-pas and ne-point across different text types

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ABSTRACT

Old French sentential negation (NEG) represents an important morphosyntactic change that has been investigated by a large number of scholars from different theoretical approaches. From the 12th to the 14th (and mainly in the 13th) century, there are two variants of this variable in competition: NEG with only *ne* (the older variant) and NEG with *ne* + *pas/mie/point*, etc. The research presented in this paper has been motivated by the wish to find relevant factors for this variation in Old French. In order to identify factors of influence on the variable NEG with or without *pas*, *mie* and *point*, we analyse two subcorpora containing two different text types. The choice of the tested factors is rooted both in variational linguistics and in previous studies on Old French negation, implying (extralinguistic) diasystematic factors like diatopic and diastratic ones as well as intralinguistic factors like transitivity of the verb, word order and clause type. Main findings are the probable relevance of clause type and the influence of socially definable (diastratic) groups. Beyond this, the results across the two different text type are predominantly similar, but we found differences as well. This leads us to plead in favour of the importance of considering the factor text type while working on diachronic corpora.

1. INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS

The evolution of French sentential negation is one of the important features of French morphosyntactic variation in diachrony and it reveals a major morphosyntactic change that is still ongoing. This change can be summarised as described by Jespersen (1917): initially, *ne* was the unique pre-verbally placed particle of negation. Later, a number of post-verbal particles of reinforcement like *pas*, *mie* or *point* were grammaticalised and used together with *ne*.¹ In Modern

¹ Price (1997) gives a survey of the particles and an interpretation of their evolution. See also Price (1962), Mosegaard Hansen (2003), Martineau and Mougeon (2003), Dufter and Stark (2007), Mathieu (2009) and Ingham (2013).

French, the use of *ne* alone is heavily restricted,² and *ne-pas* is the standard sentential negation. In modern spoken French, there is a clear tendency to drop *ne* (*J'viens pas* – 1SG come-PRS.1SG NEG – 'I don't come'). This more recent evolution is discussed in other contributions to the present Special Issue (e.g. in Zimmermann and Kaiser as well as in Meisner and Pomino), but it is not the focus of our paper. We will concentrate on Old French negation instead.

The medieval variation between *ne-Ø* and *ne*-particles has been discussed primarily in terms of emphasis marking and grammaticalisation (e.g. Detges, 2003; van der Auwera, 2009), but only little in terms of variational³ linguistics. The research presented in this paper will not be concerned with the process nor with the grammaticalisation of *pas*, *mie*, *point* (and their variants); it has been motivated by our intention to uncover factors that correlate with the variation between *ne-Ø* and *ne*+reinforcement in 'text languages' in general, i.e. languages or language stages that no longer have living native speakers, but only written sources.⁴ In order to be able to identify the variance between text types, we will first examine variations found in the manuscripts of one and the same narrative text, i.e. the *Charroi de Nîmes* (composed in the 12th century, manuscripts from the 13th and 14th centuries), and then compare these results with those of the study of variation in a corpus of 180 Old French charters from the 13th century.

We have chosen these sources for the following reasons: Firstly, they provide us with different text types, which allow textual comparisons. Secondly, these text types permit us to study linguistic variability inside each of the sub-corpora due to their internal comparability. Both corpora present linguistic variation framed by their respective tradition (all *Charroi* manuscripts contain the same narration) and sociopragmatic context (the charters represent the parochial political and economic relations between given medieval sovereigns), which excludes thematic randomness. Importantly, we insist that different manuscript versions of one story should no longer be considered errors of copyists (as claimed in the Lachmannian tradition). The so-called 'New Philology' has drawn medievalists' attention to the fact that copyists working on non-authoritative secular texts are not just copying an original or 'Vorlage'. More often than not they are in fact involved in a complex activity of transmission of a cultural product with a specific public in mind (see Cerquiglini, 1989, the special issue of *Speculum* vol. 65, 1990 and Schøsler, 2004a, with references).

Our choice of descriptive factors that potentially correlate with *ne* alone or *ne*-reinforcement is rooted in basic assumptions of variational linguistics in the tradition

² Among others in negated sentences with *cesser* 'cease', *oser* 'dare' and *pouvoir* 'can'; cf. Grevisse and Goose (1988: §§ 974 and 975).

³ The term *variational* linguistics is used here according to the tradition of Flydal (1952) and Coseriu (1966), not to be confused with *variationist* linguistics in the tradition of Labov (1966). For this distinction see, among others, Gadet (2003: 98), and Völker (2009: 34).

⁴ The term *text language* has been introduced by Suzanne Fleischman, see Fleischman (2000: 33): "'text languages' (i.e. dead languages or older stages of living languages)." Remacle (1948) has introduced the term *scripta* for the same phenomenon (see Völker, 2003: 35–70).

of Flydal (1952) and Coseriu (1966). Among these assumptions, we maintain in particular that in order to understand language change, it makes sense to investigate not only language internal correlations, but also extralinguistic factors, including diatopic, diastratic, and diamesic ones, because we believe that language change is not only linked to internal, but also to language external factors. We combine these variational assumptions with the ideas on the spreading of language change presented by Andersen (2008). According to the actualisation theory of Andersen, innovation ‘from below’ spreads from unmarked to marked syntactic contexts: ‘Typically in internally motivated change, an innovation is extended to unmarked contexts earlier than to corresponding marked contexts [...]’ (Andersen, 2008: 36). An innovation ‘from above’, on the other hand, spreads from marked to unmarked syntactic contexts and is typically introduced in a situation of language contact. This could, for example, consist of an influence from the standard language on dialects, or from a foreign language of prestige. In the case of innovations that start from below and are internally motivated, such as the negation particles studied in this paper, we would expect to find the first occurrences in unmarked contexts, which in terms of text genre are closest to direct speech. These will later spread to other contexts. Moreover, in terms of language structure, we expect internally motivated changes to start in unmarked categories, i.e. in main clauses before embedded clauses.

Combining the insights from variational linguistics and from the actualisation theory, the goal of this paper is to cast light on the interplay between potential factors, which are predictable from the two theoretical sources, in order to provide a better understanding of synchronic variation in ongoing language change. Thus, the purpose of this study is not an exhaustive description of variation in negation in medieval French, but a paradigmatic description of a ‘synchronic snapshot in history’ which allows us to identify intra- and extralinguistic factors triggering the different variants.

In the following sections, we will first present our corpora (section 2), and our methodology (section 3). The sections 4, 5 and 6 present the results of our empirical investigations. We will study potential factors determining variation, starting from intralinguistic factors (section 4), and progressing to extralinguistic factors (sections 5 and 6). We conclude in section 7.

2. TEXTUAL BASE

Our study provides a comparative analysis of two different text types: one subcorpus consists of manuscripts from the 13th to the 14th centuries that contain the same narrative text (*Charroi de Nîmes*); the second one consists of 180 Old French original charters dispatched or received by the Counts of Luxembourg between 1237 and 1281.

2.1 Corpus I (*Charroi de Nîmes*)

Corpus I consists of eight manuscripts and a fragment of the *Charroi de Nîmes*, which is a narrative verse text probably composed in the 12th century. The

manuscripts all narrate the same plot, so the overall frame is identical (i.e. Guillaume d'Orange's reconquest of the Saracen-occupied city of Nîmes, by replicating the ruse of the Trojan Horse). However, the presentation and the wording vary among manuscripts, which date from the 13th to the 14th centuries and have been located by means of the method elaborated by Anthonij Dees (1987).⁵

The manuscripts have been transcribed by Lene Schösler and Pieter van Reenen. They are included first in the electronic data base of Antonij Dees, later in the new version of the Amsterdam corpus elaborated by Achim Stein (Stein et al., 2006). There is no printed edition of the manuscripts with a systematic indication of variants.⁶ The investigation of the manuscripts has been carried out manually.

2.2 Corpus II (charters)

Corpus II consists of 180 Old French original charters dispatched or received by the Counts of Luxembourg between 1237 and 1281, edited by Holtus, Overbeck and Völker (2003).⁷ The reason for this choice is twofold:

1. The period of time: The corpus covers the period from 1237 (when the first Old French charter from Luxembourg was written under Countess Ermesinde) to 1281 (the death of Ermesinde's son, Count Henri Blondel), and therefore corresponds to the midpoint of the time period covered by the *Charroi de Nîmes* texts (12th–14th century).
2. The regional origin of the corpus: The issues treated in the charters are mainly located in a zone around the county of Luxembourg, with the communicative range of the charters differing from charter to charter.⁸ The corpus enables us to distinguish between charters with a bigger communicative range and those with a locally restricted communicative range, and to examine them separately.

2.3 Editors' policy

Both subcorpora are diplomatic editions. The editors have not changed or 'normalised' the text in any way. This policy assures a realistic representation of variants in the corpus, which seems to us an indispensable condition for linguistic work with diachronic texts. Due to the absence of native speaker judgements, it is not possible for a current-day editor to identify variants from mistakes with absolute certainty; even mistakes may be diachronic variants in the sense of past or future variants. In short: In the context of linguistic analysis, mistakes are simply too valuable to be eliminated from a text.

⁵ Dees (1987) identifies the dialectal features of literary texts by means of diatopically marked linguistic and graphic features identified from original charters, which are dated and dialectally located.

⁶ Arguments in favour of electronic editions with parallel presentation of all variants are found in Schösler (1984) and Schösler (2004b).

⁷ See also www.rmnet.uni-trier.de/cgi-bin/RMnetIndex.tcl?hea=qf&for=qafranzu

⁸ For the localisation see Holtus, Overbeck and Völker (2003: 45–99).

3. METHODOLOGY AND PROCEEDING

3.1 *Variation in and between texts*

In our manuscripts, we find that a verse is almost identical between manuscripts, except for variation in the expression of sentential negation, see e.g. verse 2897/1448⁹ of the *Charroi de Nîmes* quoted below in example (1). This implies that the variants are more or less synonymous. The verse in question is found in eight out of the nine manuscripts. The mss. of the families A and B (verse 2897 / 1582) present *ne* + Ø,¹⁰ C (verse 2897 / 1472) *ne* + *mie*. Ms D (verse 2897 / 1444) displays irrelevant variation without negation:

(1)

A1 Et dist Otran: “De ce ne sai
And said-PRF.3SG Otran: “Of this NEG know-PRS.ISG
que die”
what say- PRS.SBJV.ISG”

‘And Otran said: I don’t know what to say about this’

A2 Et dist Otranz: “De ce ne sai que die”

A3 Et dit Otran: “De ce ne sai que die”

A4 Et dist Otran: “De ce ne sai que die”

F lacuna

B1 Et dist Otranz: “De ce ne sai
And said-PRF.3SG Otran: “Of this NEG know-PRS.ISG
que dire”
what say- INF”

‘And Otran said: I don’t know what to say about this’

B2 Et dist Otran: “De ce ne sai que dire”

C Et dist Otran: “Iche ne sai je
mie”

And said-PRF.3SG Otran: “This NEG know-PRS.ISG I
NEG-PARTICLE”

‘And Otran said: I don’t know about this’

D Et dist Otran: “Grant folie me dites”

And said-PRF.3SG Otran: “great folly me-DAT tell-PRS.2PL”

‘And Otran said: “you tell me sheer folly”

Example (1) is an illustration of the usefulness of manuscripts for the understanding of variation, because they permit an examination of comparable content, expressed in slightly different terms.

⁹ The first verse number is a general numbering of all nine versions collated by Lene Schosler and Piet van Reenen, and the second is the individual numbering of each manuscript, which permits the retrieval of the quotation.

¹⁰ Because the A-family has identical structure, only the ms. A1 has been glossed. Since B1 and B2 are identical, only B1 has been glossed. We will gloss in a similar way in the following in order to save space and reduce repetition.

3.2 Negation: Cases included and cases excluded in the study

Our study will focus on the frequent Old French sentential negation *ne* + Ø in comparison to the negation with the preverbal negation particle and one of the postverbal negative adverbs *mie* (< lat. MICA ‘breadcrumb’), *pas* (< lat. PASSUS ‘step’), *point* (< lat. PUNCTUM ‘point’). We exclude negative pronouns like *personne* ‘nobody’ and partial¹¹ negative adverbs like *gaire* ‘hardly’, *jamaïs* ‘never’, *plus* ‘no more’ as well as negative quantifiers like *aucun* ‘any’. We have also excluded a number of other postverbal elements that do not occur in the charter subcorpus: *âme*, *alie*, *goutte*, *mot* (see Möhren, 1980).

We will not specially investigate partitive negation, i.e. negative constructions that define a quantity as distinct from a whole (*Je vois des oiseaux* ‘I see (some) birds’ → *Je ne vois pas d’oiseaux* ‘I do not see any birds’). According to Price (1962) and according to recent research by Martineau (2009), *point* is chosen in a partitive context in Old French; the particle *mie* is rare, and *pas* is not found in a partitive context before the 17th century.

Finally, we exclude examples with expletive *ne*, i.e. cases where *ne* has no negative meaning, for example in contexts of comparison, see v. 0948 from ms. C:

- (2)
 Plus les redoute que ne les
 More them fear-PRS.3SG than NEG them
 a amés.
 have-AUX.PRS.3.SG love-PST.PTCP
 ‘He fears them more than he loves them’

3.3 Inventory of factors to study for the variation between *ne* ... Ø, *ne* ... *mie*, *ne* ... *pas*, and *ne* ... *point*

The traditional accounts of the distribution of *ne* ... Ø, *ne* ... *mie*, *ne* ... *pas*, and *ne* ... *point* have usually investigated just one of a number of possible factors of variation.¹² In contrast to traditional approaches, we have chosen to test more potential factors. As explained in the introduction, our two theoretical sources, i.e. variational linguistics and actualisation theory, adapted to the present field of investigation, lead us to propose a number of potential factors, which may provide a better understanding of the variation between *ne* alone and *ne*+reinforcement for sentential negation in our corpus, embracing both potential intra- and extralinguistic factors.

¹¹ *Partial* in the sense of ‘with semantic focus’, i.e. negative adverbs which focus on a specific semantic aspect or do not totally reverse the polarity of an utterance (see Price, 1997: 173).

¹² See e.g. Buridant (2000: §§ 606–610), who invokes the factors \pm expressivity and diatopic variation in his presentation of variation between Ø and the different particles of negation. Since \pm expressivity is a vague factor and rather difficult to test, we have not included it in our investigation.

4. INTRALINGUISTIC FACTORS OF VARIATION

4.1 *The closer linguistic context*

It is generally accepted that the modern French particles of reinforcement of sentential negation originated as direct objects, which later lost their original meaning and grammaticalised as the second part of a bipartite sentential negation, following the well-known cycle of Jespersen (Jespersen, 1917). If this is correct, there are at least two consequences:

- If particles of negation originate from direct objects, in the early stages, we should find accordingly more transitive than intransitive verbs with negative adverbs. However, verbs of movement + *pas* ('step') will supposedly behave differently from transitive verbs. We will have a closer look at this in section 4.1.1.
- If particles of negation originate from direct objects, we would expect that a 'proper' direct object might have an influence on the use of particles of negation. A 'proper' direct object might indeed block the use of particles, until these have been fully grammaticalised.

The following examples from the *Charroi de Nîmes* illustrate this last point, the hypothesis being that an expressed direct object prevents the use of a particle of negation.

The examples (3) 0848 A3 0406 and (4) 1200 A1 0618 clearly have 'proper' direct objects (*honneur*, *gant*), and no particle of negation:

- (3)
 Quant ceste hennor recevoir ne volez
 If this honour receive-INF NEG want-PRS.2PL
 'If you do not want to receive this honour'

- (4)
 S' avec Guillelme ne recevez le gant
 If with Guillelme NEG receive-PRS.2PL ART glove
 'If you do not receive the glove together with Guillaume'

In contrast to that, examples (5) and (6) have objects without articles, which function almost as incorporated objects. These objects are very close in meaning to a reinforcement particle (*mal*, *mot*):

- (5) 1655 A2 0835
 Ceus de la vile ne vorrent il mal¹³
 Those of ART city NEG will-FUT.3PL they harm
 fere
 do-INF
 'They would do no harm to those from the city'

¹³ In this example, we exclude the possibility of interpreting *mal* as an adverb, because the verb *fere* requires an explicit direct object.

(6) 0707 C 0388

Ne deïst mot por l' onor Constantin
 NEG say-PRS.3SG word for ART honour Constantin
 'He would say no word for the honor of Constantin'

The ms B2 verse 0898 B2 0460 illustrates the case where a measure phrase (*i.e. denier*, 'one coin') is very close in meaning to a reinforcement particle:

(7)

Com aver roy qui ne vaut .i.
 As have-INF king who NEG be worth-PRS.3.SG one
 denier
 coin

'As to have a king who is not worth a penny'

A first reading indicates to us that in the *Charroi*, the absence or presence of a direct object seems to have an influence on the use of negation particles. While we found that *pas*, *mie* and *point* never occurred together with nominal direct objects, we have observed that a pronominal direct object may be combined with the particle *mie*, as illustrated in verse 1270:

(8) 1270 B2 0673

Mes ne l' ai mie enquire
 But NEG it have-AUX.PRS.1.SG NEG-PARTICLE yet
 aqité
 gain-PST.PTCP

'But I have not yet gained it'

Therefore we need to have a closer look at the importance of transitivity for the variation between *ne-Ø*, *ne-mie*, *ne-pas*, and *ne-point*.

4.1.1 Transitivity of the verb

As stated in the beginning of section 4.1, the accepted line of thinking is that the particles of reinforcement in Modern French are grammaticalised direct objects. Consequently, it is legitimate to think that old texts display more attestations of particles with transitive verbs than with intransitive verbs, with the important exception of verbs of movement that – according to the same line of thinking – combine with the particle *pas* ('step'), which was originally a measure phrase.

According to Mosegaard Hansen and Visconti (2009), *pas* and especially *mie* are frequently found with negated transitive verbs and with negated copula verbs (labelled *predicative verbs*). However, since the authors do not provide the frequencies with *ne + Ø* in their corpus, we cannot compare their results quantitatively to ours.

In what follows, we will present the quantitative results of our corpus study for this factor, based on corpus I.

Table 1a: *Type of verb, transitive / intransitive, and variant profiles* (Charroi)

Variant	Total	Type of verb: transitive	Type of verb: intransitive
Total	899 occ. 100 %	566 100%	333 100%
Ø	767 occ. 85.32 %	493 87.10 %	274 82.28 %
<i>mie</i>	84 occ. 9.34 %	45 7.95 %	39 11.71 %
<i>pas</i>	46 occ. 5.12 %	26 4.60 %	20 6.01 %
<i>point</i>	2 occ. 0.22 %	2 0.35%	0 0 %

Table 1a': *Type of verb, transitive / intransitive and frequency profiles* (Charroi)

Variant	Total	Type of verb: transitive	Type of verb: intransitive
Total	899 occ. 100 %	566 63%	333 37%
Ø	767 occ. 100 %	493 64.3 %	274 35.7 %
<i>mie</i>	84 occ. 100 %	45 53.6 %	39 46.4 %
<i>pas</i>	46 occ. 100 %	26 56.5 %	20 43.5 %
<i>point</i>	2 occ. 100 %	2 100%	0 0 %

A) *Charroi de Nîmes*

The results for the distribution of zero and particles with transitive and intransitive verbs in the *Charroi* are given in Table 1a: The frequency profiles of the variants do not differ sizeably between transitive and intransitive verbs. In addition to this, Table 1a' shows that the overall frequency of transitive verbs is higher than that of intransitive verbs, which explains the results of Mosegaard Hansen and Visconti (2009) and accordingly reduces the relevance of their observation. In our data, we see that the figures for of *ne* + Ø, *ne* + *mie* and *ne* + *pas* with transitive and intransitive constructions mirror the total distribution of transitive vs. intransitive verbs. This leads us to conclude that the distribution of *ne* + Ø and *ne* + particles with transitive or intransitive verbs does not permit the conclusion that transitivity is a relevant factor for the variation between the negation variants, as we find every variant with transitive *and* intransitive verbs. The only exception is *ne* + *point* constitutes, but this result with only two occurrences has to be interpreted with caution.

B) Charters

As shown in Table 1b, the frequency of *ne* + Ø is stable across the two categories. In addition to this, Table 1b' shows that in the charters the distribution of *ne* + Ø and *ne* + *mie* between transitive and intransitive constructions coincides with the total distribution of transitive vs. intransitive verbs (*ne* and *pas* to a lesser extent). This leads us to the same conclusion, namely that transitivity is not a relevant factor for the choice of one of the negation variants. Consequently, both the figures from the charters and from *Charroi* fail to confirm the hypothesis of Mosegaard Hansen and Visconti (2009).

In both corpora, *point* constitutes an exception, because it seems to be tied to transitivity (tr. = 100 %), in the case of the charters (with 13 occurrences) the result is more significant than in the case of *Charroi*.

Table 1b: *Type of verb, transitive / intransitive, and variant profiles (Charters)*

Variant	Total	Type of verb: transitive	Type of verb: intransitive
total	252 occ. 100 %	175 100 %	77 100 %
Ø	184 occ. 73.02 %	129 73.71 %	55 71.43 %
<i>mie</i>	31 occ. 12.30 %	21 12 %	10 12.99 %
<i>pas</i>	24 occ. 9.52 %	12 6.86 %	12 15.58 %
<i>point</i>	13 occ. 5.16 %	13 7.43 %	0 0 %

Table 1b': *Type of verb, transitive / intransitive and frequency of profiles (Charters)*

Variant	Total	Type of verb: transitive	Type of verb: intransitive
total	252 occ. 100 %	175 69.44 %	77 30.56 %
Ø	184 occ. 100 %	129 70.11 %	55 29.89 %
<i>mie</i>	31 occ. 100 %	21 67.74 %	10 32.26 %
<i>pas</i>	24 occ. 100 %	12 50 %	12 50 %
<i>point</i>	13 occ. 100 %	13 100%	0 0%

4.1.2 *Lexical semantics of the negated verb*

A second consequence of the accepted line of thinking, i.e. that the particles of reinforcement in Modern French stem from grammaticalised direct objects, is that we should expect a semantic connection between certain verbs and the original object, for example between *manger* and *mie* ('to eat', and a 'crumb'), between *voir*

and *point* ('to see' and a 'dot'), and also between verbs of movement and *pas* ('step'), see e.g. the suggestion in Buridant (2000: § 606).

A) Lexical semantics *Charroi*

However, the investigation of a number of verbs in the *Charroi*, as illustrated in Table 2a, does not confirm the existence of such a connection. The verbs studied comprise a selection of transitive and intransitive verb for which a semantic link with NEG-PARTICLE could be conceivable (e.g. to go + a step '*pas*', to see + a point '*point*', to eat + a crumb '*mie*', to ask + a word '*mot*') and others for which such a link is less conceivable (e. g. to stop, to be, to remember, to have to, to do, to know, and to come).

Table 2a: *Investigation of a semantic connection between a selection of frequent verbs having a possible semantic relation to particles of reinforcement (Charroi)*

Transitive verbs (selection)	total	Ø	<i>mie</i>	<i>pas</i>	<i>point</i>
<i>demander</i> 'to ask'	24	13	11	0	0
<i>devoir</i> 'to have to'	28	22	1	5	0
<i>faire</i> 'to do'	39	33	6	0	0
<i>manger</i> 'to eat'	1	1	0	0	0
<i>savoir</i> 'to know'	83	74	8	1	0
<i>voir</i> 'to see'	3	3	0	0	0
<i>vouloir</i> 'to want to'	79	70	0	7	2
Intransitive verbs (selection)	total	Ø	<i>mie</i>	<i>pas</i>	<i>point</i>
<i>aller</i> 'to go'	7	7	0	0	0
<i>s'arrêter</i> 'to stop'	20	20	0	0	0
<i>être</i> 'to be' (include uses as a passive aux.)	144	99	28	17	0
<i>finir</i> 'to stop'	10	5	5	0	0
<i>se membrer de</i> 'to remember'	14	12	2	0	0
<i>venir</i> 'to come'	9	8	0	1	0

In contradiction with what could be conceived, none of the verbs mentioned above favours 'its' transitive object as particle of negation. Thus, our investigation clearly disproves the existence of any etymological or semantic link between the verb and NEG-PARTICLE. This result confirms the studies of Price (see e.g. 1962) and Mosegaard Hansen (2009).

B) Lexical semantics *Charters*

Just as in the *Charroi* corpus, Table 2b shows that there is no apparent semantic selection of the particle of negation by the negated verb. The overall distribution of *ne* + Ø, *ne* + *pas*, *ne* + *mie* and *ne* + *point* does not differ significantly from their distribution in negations with specific verbs. This might be interpreted as a hint of early grammaticalisation of the reinforcement or that there has been a missing semantic link between verb and reinforcement from the very beginning.

We find that the frequency of specific verbs differs considerably between the two corpora. The semantic constraints of different text types favouring different

Table 2b: *Semantic connection between the most frequent full verbs and the negation variants (Charters)*

Transitive verbs (selection)	total	<i>Ø</i>	<i>mie</i>	<i>pas</i>	<i>point</i>
<i>avoir</i> ‘posses’	26	15	4	4	3
<i>tenir</i> ‘observe’	19	15	1	2	1
<i>faire</i> ‘do’	13	10	2	0	1
<i>prendre</i> ‘take’	9	5	1	2	1
<i>rendre</i> ‘render’	5	4	1	0	0
<i>payer</i> ‘pay’	5	4	0	0	1
<i>demander</i> ‘ask’	0	0	0	0	0
Intransitive verbs (selection)	total	<i>Ø</i>	<i>mie</i>	<i>pas</i>	<i>point</i>
<i>être</i> ‘be’ (no passive constr.)	38	25	6	7	0
<i>demeurer</i> ‘stay’	5	2	0	3	0
<i>(re)venir</i> ‘come’	4	3	0	1	0
<i>valoir</i> ‘be worth’	3	2	1	0	0

Table 2c: *Semantic connection between the most frequent verbs and particles (Charters) – supplementary analysis with modal auxiliary constructions.*

Modal auxiliary constr. with ...	total	<i>Ø</i>	<i>mie</i>	<i>pas</i>	<i>point</i>
<i>pouvoir</i> ‘can’	37	37	0	0	0
<i>vouloir</i> ‘want’	24	23	0	1	0
<i>devoir</i> ‘must’	6	5	0	1	0

verbs appears to be more important than any hypothesised semantic link between the negation type and the verb.

On the contrary, influence from modal auxiliary constructions may prove interesting: Isolating modal auxiliary constructions in a supplementary analysis (Table 2c) generates a result that shows a quasi-total absence of reinforcement particles in auxiliary constructions. We conclude that the variant *ne* + *Ø* persists longer in modal auxiliary constructions and seems to be backed by them.

4.1.3 Word order: Order of the negative elements

It is known that the order of elements becomes increasingly fixed during the process of grammaticalisation (see e.g. Hopper and Traugott, 1993: 50ss.). Since the grammaticalisation process of the double negation in French was not yet complete in the Middle Ages, the order of the negative elements may have an impact on the choice of the forms, i.e. *ne* + reinforcement or reinforcement + *ne*.

A) *Charroi*

In the mss, we find only two cases of the word order NEG-Particle + *ne*, both with the particle of reinforcement *pas*, see examples (9–10) below. In (9), mss B1–2 illustrate the inverted order, in (10), A1–4 present the inverted order. It is tempting to conclude that the presence of the particle of reinforcement has not yet reached

a stage of full grammaticalisation. However, no conclusions can be drawn, due to the insufficient number of relevant examples.

(9) 0682 A1 0314

Autre me done, que de cestui n'
Other me give-IMP.2SG because of this one NEG
ai soing.
have-AUX.PRS.1SG need

'Give me another, because I do not want this one'

0682 A2 0314 Autre me done, que de cestui n'ai soing.

0682 A3 0314 Autre me done, que de cestui n'ai soing.

0682 A4 0314 Autre me donne, que de cetui n'é soing.

0682 Af 0314 lacuna

0682 B1 0333 Autre me donne, cesti pas
Other me give-IMP.2SG this NEG-PARTICLE
ne volons.

NEG want-PRS.1PL

'Give me another, we do not want this one'

0682 B2 0333 Autre me done, ceste pas ne voulons.

0682 C 0376 Autre me dones; n' ai

Other me give-IMP.2SG NEG have-AUX.PRS.1SG
cure de cest don.

wish of this gift

'Give me another, because I do not want this gift'

0682 D 0392 Autre me done, que ceste ne m'
Other me give-IMP.2SG because this NEG me

es prous.

be-AUX.PRS.3SG good.

'Give me another, because this is not good for me'

(10)

2948 A1 1477 François sont lié, qui pas
French be-PRS.3PL happy who NEG-PARTICLE

ne lor vaerent,

NEG them forbid-PRS.3PL

'The French are happy, they do not forbid them this'

2948 A2 1477 François sont lié, qui pas ne lor vaerent,

2948 A3 1477 François sont liez, qui pas ne lor vaerent,

2948 A4 1477 François sont lié, qui pas ne lor vaerent,

2948 Af 1477 lacuna

2948 B1 1616 François sont proudome, onques
French be-PRS.3PL braveman-PL never

ne lor veerent
 NEG them forbid-PRS.3PL
 ‘The French are bravemen, they never forbid them this’
 2948 B2 1616 Frans sont preudonme,
 French be-PRS.3PL braveman-PL
 onques lor veerent,
 never them forbid-PRS.3PL
 ‘The French are bravemen, they never forbid them this’
 2948 C 1503 Franchois font bien que
 French do-PRS.3PL well because
 pas ne lor veerent,
 NEG-PARTICLE NEG them forbid-PRF.3PL
 ‘The French do well, because they do not forbid them this’
 2948 D 0000 lacuna

B) Charters

In the charters subcorpus, no attestation of the order NEG-Particle + *ne* was found. All occurrences with *pas*, *mie* and *point* follow the word order *ne* + verb + reinforcement. This means that if reinforcement is used in sentential negation in this subcorpus, the word order is fixed. Together with only two attestations of reinforcement + *ne* in the *Charroi* corpus – both of which could be interpreted as resulting from rhyme or metric influence – this could be seen as an argument for an advanced grammaticalisation of *pas*, *mie* and *point*.

4.2 The larger linguistic context: main vs. embedded clauses

It is known that syntactic variation between main and embedded clauses may be linked to ongoing changes.¹⁴ We will therefore investigate the possible relevance of the larger context, i.e. the opposition between main clause vs. embedded clause for the distribution of *ne-Ø*, *ne-mie*, *ne-pas*, and *ne-point*.

A) *Charroi*

The distribution of particles of negation in the *Charroi* shown in Table 3a clearly shows that *ne* + Ø prevails overall, but more so in embedded clauses. Hansen and Visconti (2009) arrive at similar conclusions. Why should this be so? Here, the theory of actualisation formulated by Andersen (2001 and 2006) may provide the answer. According to this theory, language internal changes spread through the categories of a given language following a predictable order of markedness. In the case of negation, it is predictable that the innovation, i.e. the use of particles of reinforcement, will start in main clauses and subsequently spread to subordinate

¹⁴ See e.g. the relevance of clause type for the actualisation of changes in Andersen (2001).

Table 3a: *Correlation between clause type and \pm reinforcement (Charroi)*

Variant	Total	Embedded	Main
Total	899 occ. 100 %	206 100 %	693 100 %
\emptyset	767 occ. 85.32 %	188 91.26 %	579 83.55 %
<i>mie</i>	84 occ. 9.34 %	11 5.34 %	73 10.53 %
<i>pas</i>	46 occ. 5.12 %	7 3.40 %	39 5.63 %
<i>point</i>	2 occ. 0.22 %	0 0 %	2 0.29 %

Table 3b: *Correlation between clause type and \pm reinforcement (Charters)*

Variant	Total	Embedded	Main
Total	254 occ. 100 %	218 100 %	36 100 %
\emptyset	183 occ. 72.05 %	174 79.82 %	9 25 %
<i>mie</i>	34 occ. 13.39 %	19 8.72 %	15 41.67 %
<i>pas</i>	24 occ. 9.45 %	15 6.88 %	9 25 %
<i>point</i>	13 occ. 5.11 %	10 4.58 %	3 8.33 %

clauses, the latter representing the original syntax. This is indeed shown by the *Charroi*-data.

B) Charters

Concerning the preservation of the original syntax, i.e. of *ne* + \emptyset in the subordinate clauses, the charters confirm the observations made above. We find an even clearer overrepresentation of *mie* and *pas* in main clauses. As a collateral result, we state that the charters show a remarkably different overall distribution of main clauses vs. embedded clauses when compared with the *Charroi* corpus. In the charter corpus, negation occurs far more frequently in embedded clauses than in main clauses. This is certainly due to the fact that charters follow a model composed of the following formulation parts: *intitulatio* (INT), *publicatio* (PUB), *narratio* (NAT), *corroboratio* (COR) and *datatio* (DAT), of which INT, PUB, COR and DAT do not usually contain formulas with negation. The only part of a charter that semantically permits negation is the NAR, the part in which the situation and the deal is described. The *narratio* is introduced by the *publicatio* e.g. with *je fais savoir a tous que...* ('I make known to everybody that...'), thus the entire *narratio* syntactically depends on this introduction, see example (11):

(11)

- [1] [INT] · Je Hanrif Coenf de Luceleborch · de la Rouche / et March(is) de erlonf / [PUB] fais conoissant a tous celf qui cef
 [2] Lettres verront et ourront · [NAR] que fe Marguerite dame de la Rouche et arnoulf fel filf Siref de la
 [3] Rouche ne tenoent le uendage quil ont fait a touf iorf / al abbeeffe et au couant del abbeie de
 [4] cleirefontaine del ordre de citiaus qui fiet deleif Erlonf le chafel / einfi com lef Lettres qui en sunt
 [5] faites le tesmoignent · Je le feroe tenir en bone foi loialment auf deuant dif · Marg(uerite) · dame de la /
 [6] Rouche / et a arnoult son fil signor de la Rouche a lour proiere et a lour requeste · [COR] Et pour
 [7] ce que ce soit estable chose / Je ai fait cef presenf Lettres faeleir de mon fael / en tesmoignage
 [8] de veritei · [DAT] les quels furent donees et faites / En lan del incarnation nostre signor de – M · CC · Lv ·
 [9] an on mois de feurier¹⁵

‘[INT] · I, Henry, Count of Luxembourg and Larochette and Marquis of Arlon, [PUB] make known to all those who see and listen to this letter· [NAR] that if Margu  rite, Dame of Larochette, and Arnold, her son, Sire of [3] Larochette, do not comply with the selling of the castle of Arlon, done for keeps, to the abbess and the convent of [4] Clairefontaine of the Cistercian order just as the documents [5] written on this behalf bear witness to it, I shall make the above named Margu  rite, Dame of [6] Larochette, and Arnold, her son, Sire of Larochette, following their request, observe it. [COR] And in order to [7] validate and confirm this testimony I affix my seal to the here present letter · [8] [DAT] which was issued in the year of the incarnation of Christ 1255¹⁶ [9] in the month of February

Put differently, the massive presence of negation in embedded clauses is a consequence of the fact that the major part of the charters is the *narratio*, formally subordinated to aforementioned introductions like ... *fais savoir a tous que...* / ... *fais connaissant a tous que...*

In light of this, the overrepresentation of reinforced negation in main clauses is even more meaningful in the charters than in the *Charroi*.

¹⁵ Charter wIII217 (February 1256) from Holtus, Overbeck and V  lker (2003: 297).

¹⁶ Document in Easter Style (in the Middle Ages, the numeric beginning of the new year varied from diocese to diocese – more than a few began to count a new year on Easter Sunday), which means that in modern style the year is 1256.

5. THE EXTRALINGUISTIC CONTEXT (IN LITERARY TEXTS)

The following subsections provide the results of our investigations on discourse-pragmatic and textual aspects (prose vs. poetry and narration vs. direct speech); due to the nature of the texts it was only possible to do this with the *Charroi* subcorpus.

5.1 *Discourse-new vs. discourse-old*

According to a hypothesis first presented by Schwenter (2006), later elaborated by Hansen and Visconti (2009), specific discourse-pragmatic factors influence the use of particles of reinforcement. According to this hypothesis, the variation between forms of negation performs different pragmatic or discourse functions. Following these authors, *ne* . . . \emptyset is favored in propositions that are discourse-new, whereas in discourse-old contexts *ne* + reinforcement particle is used to refer to information already introduced. Accordingly, we should expect to find variation only among different particles of negation, whereas variation between the zero-form and reinforcement should be excluded, because discourse-new and discourse-old will be the same in all manuscripts. However, such a variation exists, see e.g. the verse 2897, quoted above as example (1), with variation between the zero-form and *mie*. In conclusion, the variation between forms of negation at this stage of language is independent of the distinction between discourse-new and discourse-old. Interestingly, Wallage (2013) arrives at a similar conclusion concerning Middle English negation.¹⁷

5.2 *Prose vs. poetry*

It is known that in literary texts, the distinction prose vs. verse is relevant for the understanding of variation between competing forms. For this reason we will investigate whether this distinction is also relevant for the distribution of particles of negation.¹⁸ Table 4 shows the importance of the position of the particle of reinforcement in the verse, and in particular the influence of assonance position on the use of the particle *mie*. This result confirms the study by Price (1962: 18), who has found that *mie* is particularly frequent in assonance or rhyme position, especially in Anglo-Normand, Normand, and central dialects (Price, 1962: 24–25). Indeed, Price interprets the frequency of *mie* in verse texts from the 15th century as a stylistic feature.

¹⁷ Wallage (2013: 23): 'Instead, these data indicate that the discourse-old/discourse-new distinction is independent of the increasing overall frequency of *ne* . . . not'.

¹⁸ See e.g. Schosler (2001).

Table 4: *Assonance and the distribution of Ø / particles of reinforcement (Charroi)*

Variant	Total	Position in the verse	
		Interior	Assonance
Total	899 occ. 100 %	848 100 %	51 100 %
Ø	767 occ. 85.32 %	767 90.49 %	0 (not possible) 0 %
<i>mie</i>	84 occ. 9.34 %	33 3.89 %	51 100 %
<i>pas</i>	46 occ. 5.12 %	46 5.42 %	0 0 %
<i>point</i>	2 occ. 0.22 %	2 0.24 %	0 0 %

Table 5: *The distribution of Ø and particles of negation according to the conception of the text (narration – direct speech, Charroi)*

Variant	Total	Style	
		Narration	Direct speech
Total	899 occ. 100 %	195 100 %	704 100 %
Ø	767 occ. 85.32 %	171 87.69 %	596 84.66 %
<i>mie</i>	84 occ. 9.34 %	9 4.62 %	75 10.65 %
<i>pas</i>	46 occ. 5.12 %	15 7.69 %	31 4.40 %
<i>point</i>	2 occ. 0.22 %	0 0 %	2 0.29 %

5.3 The distinction between narration and direct speech

According to the principles of the theory of actualisation formulated by Andersen (2001, 2006) referred to previously, we expect internally motivated language changes to appear first in speech and later in written texts.¹⁹ In a ‘text language’, we do not have direct access to direct speech, and we should not accept all instances of direct speech as actually reproducing orality. However, research in different domains (see Andersen 2001) points to systematic differences between narration and direct speech in older stages of languages. This has motivated us to study the possible relevance of this distinction for the variation of forms of negation in the *Charroi*. Table 5 shows that this distinction is not relevant for making a choice between Ø and particles of negation. However, against our expectation, the variant frequencies

¹⁹ This view on direct speech as locus of change is independent of, but not in contradiction with the views of Koch and Oesterreicher on orality (e.g. 1985).

do not differ significantly between direct speech and narration. This result does not confirm the results of Price (1962: 21).

Let us recall that the text investigated here, the *Charroi de Nîmes*, was originally an epic text of oral composition, which was later written down. There are many passages of fictional direct speech in the text, and it is not sure that they are traces of its oral origin.

6. THE EXTRALINGUISTIC CONTEXT: DIASYSTEMATICALLY RELEVANT FACTORS

In the framework of variational linguistics, the general starting point is the observation that variation in linguistic productions does not only depend on internal, linguistic factors or on pure ‘performance’ errors, but that it can also be described as the reflex of coexisting different subsystems or ‘grammars’ inside one language community. Following Berruto (2010), the most frequently assumed extralinguistic dimensions of these subsystems are the diatopic (geographic), the diastratic (social group), the diaphasic (communication context), the diachronic (time) and the diamesic (medium, oral vs. written).

As extralinguistic information is more easily available in the case of the charters than in literary texts, in the following we will focus on diatopic and diastratic factors of variation in these texts.

6.1 *Diatopic variation*

Regarding the influence of dialects on the distribution of negation particles in older stages of French, the most detailed study is that of Price (1962). Price distinguishes the following diatopic distribution:

In **Anglo-Normand**, and **Normand** varieties, Price mainly found the particle *pas*, but hardly any cases of *mie*.

In **central texts** (Île-de-France, Champagne, Orléanais), Price mainly found the particle *pas*, but hardly any cases of *mie* or *point*.

In the **Lorrain varieties**, Price found the opposite pattern, i.e. mainly *mie*, but hardly any cases of *pas*.

In the **Picard** and **Wallon varieties**, *pas* and *mie* were rather frequent, but *mie* was the most frequent of the particles.

In the following, we will compare our results with those of Price (1962).

A) *Charroi*

Little is known about the geographical distribution of the manuscripts of the *Charroi*. Only ms. C stems from the North-Western part of France, according to the localisation of Dees (1987). Table 6a shows an extensive use of the particle *mie*. This result confirms the dialectal investigation by Price (1962).

Table 6a: *Distribution in the manuscripts (Charroi)*

Variant	Total	Manuscript								
		A1	A2	A3	A4	Af	B1	B2	C	D
Total	899	99	108	93	104	7	120	117	124	127
	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %
Ø	767	85	93	79	90	5	102	102	99	112
	85.32 %	85.6 %	86. %	84.9 %	86.5 %	71.4 %	85 %	87.2%	79.8 %	88.2 %
<i>mie</i>	84	8	9	8	8	1	11	10	17	12
	9.34 %	8.1 %	8.3 %	8.6 %	7.7 %	14.3 %	9.2 %	8.5 %	13.7 %	9.4 %
<i>pas</i>	46	6	6	6	6	1	6	4	8	3
	5.12 %	6.1 %	5.6 %	6.5 %	5.8 %	14.3 %	5 %	3.4 %	6.5 %	2.4 %
<i>point</i>	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
	0.22 %						0.8 %	0.9 %		

Table 6b: *Diatopic variation of ne + Ø, ne + mie, ne + pas and ne + point (Charters)*

Variant	Region				
	All regions	Luxembourg	Luxembourg + Lorraine	Luxembourg + Bar	Luxembourg + Flanders
Total	259	42	82	48	38
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Ø	186	34	67	36	33
	71.8%	80.9%	81.7%	75%	86.8%
<i>mie</i>	37	5	12	9	5
	14.3%	11.9%	14.6%	18.8%	13.2%
<i>pas</i>	24	1	3	3	0
	9.3%	2.4%	3.7%	6.2%	0 %
<i>point</i>	12	2	0	0	0
	4.6%	4.8%	0%	0%	0%

B) Charters

The slightly elevated percentage of *ne ... mie* in the charter corpus (which is mainly of Eastern and North Eastern provenance) as well as the even higher percentage of *ne ... mie* in the partial corpus ‘Luxembourg + Flanders’ confirm the results of Price (1962).

6.2 Diastratic variation

Due to its literary character, the *Charroi* corpus is free from socially triggered variation.

On the basis of Titz’s statement (1926: 80s.) that the crown had a conservative influence on the written language, one might expect the frequency of *ne + Ø* to be higher in the King’s charters than charters from a lower social strata. In order to verify this hypothesis, the charters were sorted in three diastratic groups (see

Table 7: *Diastratic variation of ne + Ø, ne + mie, ne + pas and ne + point (Charters)*

Variant	Social group: Charter send to / received from...			
	All groups together	...lower noblesse	...higher noblesse	...king
total	259 100%	60 100%	129 100%	70 100%
Ø	186 71.8%	51 85%	101 78.3%	34 48.6%
<i>mie</i>	37 14.3%	7 11.6%	22 17.1%	8 11.4%
<i>pas</i>	24 9.3%	1 1.7%	3 2.3%	20 28.6%
<i>point</i>	12 4.6%	1 1.7%	3 2.3%	8 11.4%

Table 7). Table 7 shows the social distribution of different negation variants in the charters corpus, with a high percentage of *ne + pas* and a significantly low percentage of the traditional *ne + Ø* in the charters with an implication of the royal administration. The King's charters do not stand for the traditional variant (*ne ... Ø*), but show a relatively high percentage of the innovative variant (the modern standard variant *ne ... pas*). We interpret this as a hint of the important role of the King's chancery in defining written, and later on standard, French.²⁰ Recent studies confirm the importance of the French King's chancery for the early formation of the French standard variety (e.g. Videsott, 2013 and Grübl, forthcoming). This result clearly contradicts Titz 1926.

6.3 Diachronic variation

Table 8 represents an overall overview of percentages of *ne ... Ø* in literary texts from the 12th to the 15th century based on information quoted in Martineau (2009), Marchello-Nizia (1997), and Price (1962). It shows a decline of *ne + Ø*, even if this decline is not a linear one. The leading theory to explain the evolution of negation is the Jespersen (1917) cycle, which interprets this evolution as a weakening cycle followed by a reinforcement cycle of negative elements. Our corpora are synchronic cuts in history and do not represent sufficient diachronic successivities. Thus, they are not composed in such a way as to permit an investigation on diachronic *evolution*. However, the cut is well placed to represent the transformation period from *ne + Ø* to *ne + reinforcement*. The King's charters in particular may be interpreted as a witness for this ongoing change, linked to the beginning of standardisation in French. Charters produced in relative isolation and not influenced by the King's chancery show a distinctly higher percentage of *ne ... Ø* than the King's

²⁰ See also Völker (2007: 215–218).

Table 8: *Proportion of ne + Ø, in a selection of literary texts from the 12th to the 15th century*

Texts	Datation	% ne + Ø	Proportion of ne + Ø compared to the total occ. of negations
Aliscans	1150–1200	84,5%	(724/857)
Enéas	1160	76,9 %	(782/1017)
Joinville	1309	68,7%	(433/630)
Chirurgie Maître Henri	1314	44,7%	(93/208)
Bérinus	End of the 14th c.	73%	(1239/1696)
Quinze Joies de mariage	around 1400	39,5%	(17/43)
Commynes	End of the 15th c.	42,6%	(182/427)
Pathelin,	1464/end 15th c.	58,7%	(94/160)
Jehan de Paris	end 15th c.	60%	(119/198)

charters that prefer the innovative variant that later on will be the French standard negation.

7. CONCLUSION

In this paper, our intention was to identify linguistic and extralinguistic factors correlating with the variation between multi-morpheme negations and the older variant *ne + Ø* in Old French, in order to provide a better understanding of the variation across a synchronic cut in an ongoing language change. The choice of factors to investigate was mainly rooted in variational linguistics and in the theory of actualisation. Our investigation proceeded from intra- to extralinguistic factors. Among the intralinguistic factors, we have examined factors of the textual context related to transitivity and to the lexical semantics of the negated verb. We have found indications for a correlation between the presence of a nominal direct object and the absence of negation particles, which could be interpreted in that way that the negation particle is still perceived as filling the direct object-slot. On the other hand, particles of negation are equally frequent with transitive and intransitive verbs (section 4.1 and 4.1.1). We rejected the hypothesis of a semantic link between particles of negation and verbs (section 4.1.2). We found that the order of the particles of negation virtually always conforms to patterns of modern French, i.e. *ne + particle*, which could be taken as a sign of advanced grammaticalisation (section 4.1.3). Concerning the larger context (still linguistic), we found that the type of clause (main *vs.* embedded) seems to be relevant for the distribution of *ne + Ø vs. ne + particles*, which conforms to the prediction made in actualisation theory. Indeed, main clauses are unmarked compared to embedded and therefore display innovation earlier than embedded clauses (section 4.2). An interesting collateral result was that the overall representation of negation in embedded *vs.* main clauses differs significantly between the two subcorpora. We take this as an argument for the relevance of diatextual variation. Referring to this diatextual variation turned out not to be epiphenomenal. This leads us to plead clearly for taking into account

diatextual variation and the peculiarities of text types while assembling historical text corpora.

In terms of the extralinguistic context, we tested a discourse pragmatic hypothesis on the distribution of *ne* + Ø *vs.* *ne* + particles, because this hypothesis has been widely discussed for a number of languages. However, this hypothesis is not confirmed by our corpus. Our results do not confirm neither the relevance of factors of distribution predicted from the actualisation theory and from principles of variational linguistics, i.e. the frequency of negation particles in direct speech. Finally, our investigation has shown the relevance of factors related to diasystematic differences for the distribution of *ne* + Ø *vs.* *ne* + particles. Because our investigation deliberately discarded the diachronic perspective in order to study the interplay of factors in synchrony, we focused on diatopic and diastratic factors. As for diatopy, we found that the geographic origin of the texts is a relevant factor of distribution (section 6.1). Concerning diastratic variation, our investigation points to the King's chancery as a factor of innovation.

In short, our research has permitted us to study in detail the interplay of possible factors of change in a synchronic cut in time. The composition of our corpus enabled us to go into detail with distinctions that are usually difficult to study in a historical 'text language'. In particular, it permitted us to study variants with comparable meaning, and to study both diastratic and diatopic variation.

Finally, based on a historical synchronic cut, our investigation sheds some light on the understanding of synchronic variation. Let us conclude by elaborating on this point: In order to function as a means of communication, any language has elements of stability. On the other hand, any language has elements that change. At any synchronic point, we find elements of stability and elements of innovation that the linguist can identify as such only because of his or her knowledge of diachronic processes. Our choice of negation, a linguistic variable undergoing a profound modification in the Old French period, enabled us to investigate a number of influence factors predictable from our basic assumptions about language change. We have examined in which contexts we find the old forms, and in which contexts we find the new, competing forms. Thus, our synchronic cut reveals factors of change 'at work', so to speak. These factors point both to the past, because the old form (*ne* + Ø) survives in certain contexts, and to future changes and their gradual actualisation (*ne* + particle) that appears in other contexts.

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